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MR. MASON'S

Thanksgiving Sermon.



A
S E R M O N,

DELIVERED AT

MIDDLEBURY,

VERMONT;

ON OCCASION OF THE ANNIVERSARY

THANKSGIVING,

1798.

By THOMAS MASON, A. B.
OF PRINCETON, MASSACHUSETTS; CANDIDATE
FOR THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

*Alleluiab; for the Lord God Omnipotent
reigneth. Rev. xix. 6.*

PRINTED AT RUTLAND, VERMONT,
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FOR THE SUBSCRIBERS.

1799.

S. F. R. M. O. N.

DECEASED AT

MIDDLEBURY

VERMONT

ON THE 15TH OF THE MONTH OF

THANKSGIVING



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PRINTED AT RUTLAND VERMONT

BY JOHN W. WILSON

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*The government of God an occasion of joy to
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THANKSGIVING SERMON.

THE progress of human life is diversified with different scenes, and marked by such successive stages, as to bear a very close analogy and resemblance, to the various temporary schemes and enterprises among mankind. In all these there is always an *object* first proposed to the mind;—then follows the *means* most suitable for its attainment;—after this, all that remains, is to put these means into execution, for the accomplishment and acquisition of the desired end.

These circumstances severally attend the life of man. The journey of life is an enterprise which he undertakes by the command of his maker, in his creation. The *object* presented to his mind is the perfection of his nature, and consequent happiness;—the *mean*, by which this is to be attained, is by rendering a uniform obedience to the will of God. The proper way for executing this, is by enlightening the understanding, so as to comprehend the design of our creation;—balancing, and harmonizing all the powers of the mind, and affections of the heart, so as to give the operations of truth their due and suitable influence.

WITHOUT these leading steps the mind is left to float at random;—easily loses sight of its *object*;—forgets, or misconceives the *means*, by which it is to be attained;—and is wholly disqualified for pursuing any consistent measures in the accomplishment of the proposed end. He may have fluctuating and confused notions of the design of his creation;—he may be charmed with indigested views of happiness, as an excellent *something*, of which he knows nothing, but merely the name;—yet, in all his efforts for its attainment, he will be like a thoughtless traveller, heedlessly pursuing his journey to a distant country, of which he knows neither the distance, point of compass, or the road which leads to it.

BEFORE we set out in the execution of a projected scheme, especially if it be a scheme of any considerable importance, and in which we feel ourselves deeply concerned, we usually esteem it prudent to sit down deliberately, and calculate the cost of its execution;—the time necessary for its performance;—the labor required for its accomplishment;—the difficulties most likely to impede our progress;—the means by which they may most successfully be evaded;—the disadvantages consequent upon failure;—and the benefits resulting from its full accomplishment. When all these things have been taken into due consideration, we feel ourselves prepared to enter on the execution of our designed enterprise.

JUST analogous to this, my hearers, is the laborious enterprise of human life. It is an enterprise of great importance, and in which we are deeply concerned, because of the solemn consequences annexed to its termination. We are bound deliberately to calculate the cost of its due execution, because in case of one failure we cannot go back and begin anew; nor can we proceed without the

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greatest conceivable embarrassments. The time necessary for its performance is the whole of human life; so that we have no time to spare from our work, and the loss of a moment might destroy all past and future exertions. The labor then required for its accomplishment, ought to engage our early and constant attention. The difficulties most likely to impede our progress, are the temptations of the world;—the prevalence of animal passion; and the delusions and artifices of the great adversary of man, executed by the ministration of evil spirits. The means by which they may most successfully be evaded, are those of prayer, religious contemplation, and dependence upon God's overruling providence. The disadvantages consequent upon our failure involve all the miseries of a future life. Banishment from the presence of God;—destitution of virtue and holiness;—anguish and remorse of conscience; and wretchedness, beyond the power of language to communicate, or thought to conceive. The benefits resulting from its full accomplishment are all that the presence and favor of God can bestow. Imagine the highest, and most perfect state of happiness, which the mind can possibly delineate; and let me tell you it is all this, *and more than all this*, which is laid up in store for you. For, since the world began, has it not entered into the heart of man to conceive the thing which God hath prepared for those who love him.

SUCH reflections as these are suitable and proper to enable us to set out with favorable prospects in pursuit of life's great end. On the one hand, the high and invaluable estimation of the reward of perseverance will smooth the rough and tedious passage, animate all our exertions, and cheer our spirits along the dreary way. On the other, the terrors inseparably connected with negligence and

inattention will urge and quicken the tardy powers of human nature, chastise every wandering suggestion, and speed the lagging mind with the fleeting steps of time. Thus invited by the charms of immortal glory and happiness, and guided in our warfare, by the friendly patronage of guardian spirits, we shall be doubly fortified for shunning the dangers, and avoiding all the fatal evils lurking in our way and besetting our passage.

THE analogy between the life of man, and our temporary inventions and pursuits, may, with philosophical precision, be still further traced and applied. By reason of the constitutional imperfection attached to the human understanding, and the various adventitious circumstances of its weakness, debility, and exposedness to error, there is great danger in placing an ultimate dependence upon schemes, however deliberately concerted, where opportunity may be had for further trial, and confirmation of the suitableness and wisdom of the measures adopted. In order to take proper advantages of this nature, we should esteem it prudent to mark the several stages of our labor;—notice our progress in its accomplishment;—observe where our scheme was defective; and in what part it has succeeded according to our expectations;—enquire what causes have conspired to prosper our plans; and what have tended to retard our progress, and baffle its accomplishment. By such enquiries as these we shall be enabled to correct the errors we have adopted, and pursue the desired end with redoubled energy, and encreasing success.

So it is, my hearers, in the progression of human life. We have doubtless adopted rules by which we intend to regulate our conduct, in order to bring our lives to a glorious and happy termination: Now it would be exceedingly remarkable,

if, with all our human imperfections, some degree of error should not happen to be mingled in the plan we had proposed, as the guide and directory of our lives.

IN looking back upon the stages of childhood and youth, there are none of us, I presume, who are insensible of having fallen into many errors, and exposed ourselves to many sinful deviations from the true path of rectitude and virtue. This lays the foundation and enforces upon the human mind the importance of reflection, and serious consideration, upon the complexion and tenor of our past conduct in life.

THE youth, bordering to the verge of manhood, looks back with contempt upon the trifling amusements of childhood, and despises all its unmeaning joys. The man, of full grown maturity, despises the empty follies and vanities of youth. The philosopher disdains the ordinary pursuits of the man;—and the true christian despises them all.

THIS is a peculiar advantage we enjoy, as rational creatures, above the brutal creation, who are almost entirely incapable of future amendment, by reflection upon past error. By this mean we are capable of raising our natures to higher, and more exalted degrees of perfection, through every succeeding period of our existence, till we shall be ripened, and prepared for the society of angels, and those glorified spirits, who surround the throne, and dwell in the immediate presence of their God.

THE improvement capable of being derived from these larger, and more comprehensive reviews of past life and conduct, leads us rationally to suggest the propriety of separating human life, into select divisions of more frequent recurrence, to afford the mind constant opportunity for improvement from

reflection upon past time and conduct. This method seems to be pointed out and justified by the course of nature, and the order of providence. The successive return of day and night may be adduced as an example appointed for this purpose. The labors and pursuits of the day engage the powers of the mind, and employ the service of our hands, till the dim twilight calls us to suspend our toils, and compose our disordered thoughts. The darksome shades of evening shut from our view the busy scenes of life, and seem to invite us to serious composure and reflection. Secluded from the turbulent and perplexing scenes of wordly pursuits, we seem urged, by this retreat, to call into view the employments of the past day ;—carefully to correct the errors into which we have fallen, —gratefully to acknowledge the favors we have received from the hand of our maker ;—earnestly to implore his protection thro the silent watches of the night ; his guidance and direction thro the succeeding day ; and sincerely to repose our confidence in the uninterrupted course of his governing providence.

THE successive round of seasons breathes the same language of silent admonition and instruction ; and calls aloud for a tribute of gratitude and thanksgiving to the all wise disposer of them.

Revolving years address lectures of lively instruction to the human mind ; and ought to excite sensations of pious reverence and humble gratitude in every intelligent soul.

REVOLUTIONS in the moral world ;—scenes of adversity, as well as prosperity, are calculated for our improvement and edification, and ought to excite our gratitude and thanksgiving. For tho afflictions, for the present, be not joyous but grievous, yet they work out for us, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

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THE works of God, in the order of his providence, as they respect rational intelligent beings, are a pattern of all conceivable excellence and perfection. To illustrate and exemplify these, so as to minister to the improvement and happiness of man, is not only an indispensable duty, but the most dignified service which can employ our rational powers, as tending directly to celebrate the glory, and publish the perfections of the eternal God.

Most successfully to promote this great end was the primary design of our rulers, in the institution of this day of public thanksgiving and acknowledgement to Almighty God. Agreeably to the exordium in the proclamation, we are called aside from our secular employments, at this time, not only in conformity to the *laudable practice* of our pious ancestors, but because it is a *reasonable duty*, for the public review of our innumerable mercies;—to make suitable expressions of our absolute dependence upon the supreme ruler of the universe; and solemnly to remind ourselves of the indispensable obligations of gratitude and obedience to him for all his abundant goodness.

To guide our meditations upon this solemnly delightful interview, I have made choice of that animating and comprehensive sentiment of the inspired sovereign of Israel, recorded in the 97th Psalm, 1st verse.

“The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.”

ORDER, my hearers, is nature's first law, and the special design of this is the diffusion of happiness thro' all classes of created beings, in their various subordinations, relations, connexions and dependencies in life. Such is the wisdom of God in the plan of creation, that, every thing necessary to the performance of active beings, in order to attain the highest perfection and happiness of which

their natures are capable, is to keep steadily within the sphere assigned them by their all wise creator. This, if duly observed, would tend immediately to accomplish all the benevolent designs of God, in the creation of intelligent natures ;—harmonize every discordant note ;—and antedate the glorious communion of the heavenly mansions.

We are, my hearers, by the laws of God in our creation, confined to the narrow limits of this little fluctuating globe of earth. But, for the most of us, this is by far too great a range. We traverse with our eye the contracted limits of the visible horizon ;—visit the associate mansions and villages around us, and thus terminate the bounds of our enquiry. This earth, with all its dependencies, is a subject too great for our comprehension.

THERE is a little world within ourselves, which calls for our noblest exertions to govern and direct. The subjects of this kingdom are the various propensities, appetites, desires and passions, which inhabit the human breast, and like the jarring interests of civil communities, require the constant energy of sovereign reason to control. He who accomplishes this duty with fidelity is capable of every thing truly great, benevolent and noble. In the beautiful language of inspiration we are assured that, “ he that ruleth his spirit, is better than he that taketh a city.”

THAT condition in life is most happy, where government is maintained with such wisdom as to balance all the opposite and contending interests, and reduce every branch and member of the universal whole to their due subordination, and dependence upon each other. The truth of this observation is applicable to every possible situation in human existence. As it respects private, and even solitary individuals, he is most happy who regulates and controls all his affections by the invariable laws

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and obligations of true virtue. The doctrine of subordination then, has its origin in the very nature and constitution of man. The powers of sense and reason are often found at variance, and in opposition to each other; one then must govern, and the other submit. Now there is nothing more absurd in nature, than the supposition that passion, which is wholly blind, and incapable of attaining its own ends, should be the ruling principle in man; and there can be nothing plainer, on the contrary, than that moral judgement, reason and reflection were designed, by our creator, for the accomplishment of this design;—to direct, control and govern the actions of rational creatures. Where such a dominion as this is established in the human breast, and conducted with due wisdom and propriety, there is the most unequivocal certainty of attaining to a high degree of perfection, and consummate happiness.

THIS reasoning amplifies and extends itself to every possible circumstance and situation in human intercourse. Social domestic felicity is most happily attained and enjoyed, where family government is conducted with wisdom;—where the monstrous supposition of two separate, but subordinate heads, is cemented into one combined equality;—where dignity and affability are prudently united;—and where stern authority, and persuasion bear mutual sway and dominion.

FROM these smaller, we may naturally rise to larger communities, and observe the same principle producing precisely the same effect. The civil policy of states, empires, and kingdoms bears a very near and close analogy to the government of the heart, and discipline of families and small communities. Where wisdom and virtue are seated in the chair of magistracy, there, if any where on earth, we may hope and expect to see the true

rights of nature and of man cultivated and enjoyed. But, sad is the reflection, that there is nothing human without its imperfection. The best regulated heart is liable to be disturbed by the turbulence of passion;—the most harmonious family is exposed to temporary dissension;—and the best concerted schemes of national policy may be destroyed by rebellious, disorganizing zealots, and the fiery demagogues of ignorance and ambition.

BUT because our happiness is liable to be interrupted or destroyed, shall we neglect to *seek* it? because real blessings may be abused, shall we forbear to *choose* them? Notwithstanding all these considerations, there is a high and exalted preference to be given to wisdom, order and beauty; above folly, disorder and deformity. For all these circumstances of individual, domestic, and national happiness, we are entirely dependent upon the great arbiter of nations, and the sovereign disposer of universal nature. From these streams of his goodness, the mind is naturally led up to God, who is the source from which they all proceed. It is because the Lord reigneth and disposeth the affairs of men by his unerring wisdom, that we enjoy these signal and distinguished privileges. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will. The Lord increaseth the nations and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the nations, and straighteneth them again. He doeth according to his will in heaven, and in the earth; in the seas, and in all deep places. In his hand our breath is, and with him are all our ways.”

IN the government of the universe, and *all material systems*, we see the hand and the wisdom of God uniformly operating;—producing the utmost order, uniformity and beauty;—and terminating in effects most ravishingly delightful. These are

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untouched and unimpaired by the sacrilegious hand of mortals; and exhibit a bright postrature of divine perfection. Happy for us, the creatures of his power, that we are not permitted to handle and derange this permanent foundation of our joy and dependence. In view of this perfectly glorious and magnificent scheme, we are ready to exclaim in the enrapturing language of the divine apostle and prophet—"Alleluiah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

BUT when we take a view of the *affairs of men*, and the conduct of the *moral system*, there we follow the traces of imperfection and confusion, introduced by the agency of man, who is *partially* intrusted with its administration.

THE government be instituted by God, and is designed for the moral perfection and happiness of his intelligent creatures; yet as its administration is committed to the care of imperfect erring mortals, who are often swayed and controlled by different and contending interests and passions, we are necessarily exposed to many misfortunes and casualties, which the best concerted policy cannot wholly evade. Yet it is a subject of no small joy, and ought to excite a proportional degree of gratitude that, by the disposition of an allwise providence, we are enabled thus to lighten the burdens, and mitigate the sufferings of humanity.

IN comparison of every other division of the earth, we, as a nation, enjoy very important and distinguishing privileges. We are favored with an extent of territory, more than equal to our present necessities; and fully adequate to the demands of posterity, to the most distant ken of human vision, or the far remote boundaries of thought, or imagination. The nature of our soil is admirably adapted to the genius of our countrymen; and our atmosphere, fanned by perpetual breezes,

inspires vital soundness, health, strength and energy among all our industrious citizens: The fruitfulness of our soil gives confidence to the labors of the field; and the vernal toils of the husbandman render back, and restore the ravages of the harvest. The certain prospects of wealth invite the great body of our people to that most honorable and useful of all employments, the tillage and culture of the earth; and the habits of industry, attached to this profession, break asunder the cords of dissipation, and strengthen the bonds of social virtue and happiness. Our fields and subject animals furnish the choicest materials to shield our bodies from the inclemency of seasons; and the skill of our artists promise the speedy perfection of the most delicate manufactures.

From the storehouses of our kindred ocean we annually extract copious supplies for the food of man; while our bays, lakes and rivers, at all times, invite the hungry to the most delicate repast. These, like the widows cruse of oil, fail not by constant usage; but are a perpetual memorial that "the Lord reigneth."

The vintage and the harvest are likewise ours. Our granaries are filled with the finest of the wheat, and our barns are stored with the natural aliment of those harmless animals, which, in their turn, furnish our tables, and yield themselves for our nourishment and support. Let not the infant state of our vintage furnish occasion for the introduction of burning distillations, which carry in their train complicated maladies and distress; but rather double our industry to correct its deficiencies, and render it copious and complete.

In addition to supplying the demands of our own country, the treasures of the deep, and the copious abundance of our harvests minister to

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the necessities of foreign less happy climes, and yield us, in return, the gratifications of taste and refinement. Verily this year is crowned with divine goodness; and we have abundant reason to adopt the devout language of the pious psalmist, and with him exclaim "the lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.

A general diffusion of useful information promises the progressive investigation and future support of the native rights, and inalienable privileges of man. In our children and youth we fondly fancy the lineaments of distinguished statesmen, and heroes;—the patrons of humanity, and the future guardians of our liberties and our laws. We are distinguished, and favored above all other nations, in the constitution and administration of our government. Under a constitution like ours, there is a twofold obligation to faithfulness in legislators. The praise of men, united with an approving conscience, forms a very powerful motive to honesty in deliberation. But when it is considered that they are enacting laws for the government of themselves, when their period of administration shall expire, the principle of selflove casts a powerful balance into the scale of honesty and uprightness.

Our lot is happily cast where we enjoy the singular privilege of setting under laws of our own adoption, and rulers of our own choosing;—where the base artifices of factious intrigue, altho practised by the vile miscreants of rebellion, is however degraded and despised by every honest man. That such should find followers and proselytes is no phenomenon in the history of nations. They are usually beyond recovery, being too wise for instruction. For as Solomon justly observes—"the sluggard, is wiser, in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason;—and the you

should bray a fool in a mortar, among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his folly depart from him."

ANY covert, or underhanded measures for promotion, show a consciousness of scanty merit ; and any one who is found guilty of them, may be expected to have formed resolutions incongruous with the incumbent duties of a faithful magistrate.

THE common vinculum, which unites the interests of all the various states and nations of the earth, unavoidably implicates us in the confusion and distresses, which agitate the eastern world. Our infant navy, tho' oppressed by the perfidious and rapacious republic, promises the speedy accomplishment of exploits, as far superior to its past achievements, as the infant struggles of Hercules in his cradle were surpassed by the renowned achievements of the full grown hero. We view the period not far distant when the five headed monster shall tremble at the sound of her thunder ;—and like the trembling Israelites of old, astonished at the long sounding of the trumpet, and the mountain of smoke, shall beg for the speedy return of our insulted ministers of peace, saying—"speak thou *again* with us, and we will *now* hear ; but speak no more to us in such terrors, lest we die "

THE only consoling reflection, which we can extract from a view of these scenes of horror and desolation, is from the suggestion of the text, that "the Lord reigneth." This turbulent opposition to the rights of nature and of man ;—to the rights of truth and of religion may yet, by the overruling providence of God, terminate in the more glorious establishment of both.

FRANCE, like the ancient Assyrians, may be only the rod of God's anger, and the staff of his indignation, to chastise the idolatrous nations around them, *and themselves with the rest.* For this purpose they

may be permitted to take the spoil, and the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the street. Howbeit, *they mean not so*, but it is their design to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Therefore it shall come to pass that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work, he will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the *regency of France*, and the glory of their high looks. Tho they boast that by the strength of their own hand they have done all this;—that they have, by their own power, removed the bounds of the people;—robbed their treasures, and put down the inhabitants like a valiant man;—tho they proudly arrogate that they have found, as a nest, the riches of the people;—*and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have they gathered all the earth*;—and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped;—yet the Lord, even the Lord of hosts, shall send among their *fat ones leanness*, and *under their glory shall be kindle a burning, like the burning of a fire*. [Is. 10.]

THANKS be to God that we enjoy a peaceful retreat from these scenes of slaughter, desolation and death. Let us then sincerely rejoice that, under the reign of divine wisdom, this is our happy lot.

TO CONCLUDE—The doctrine of the text is an undeniable reason for the most solemn and constant reverence of the supreme being, on whom we are absolutely dependent, and from whom we receive every blessing we enjoy. It teaches us likewise that our only security lies in his protection, and in being the objects of his gracious regard.

IN all circumstances, whether prosperous or adverse, we are bound to acknowledge the wise appointment of the great invisible disposer of events;—be thankful to him for every instance of prosperity, and patient and humble under afflictive visita-

rions. If we thus discharge the proper duties of every state and condition in life, and are diligently employed in the practice of universal virtue, we may rationally rejoice in the comfortable prospect of his special direction and favor;—we may then adopt the sublime and triumphant language of the prophet—"altho the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."—The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice!

AMEN.



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